



# Introduction

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THE LAST previous attempt to "describe and enumerate the fundamental works" in all the principal branches of bibliography was Van Hoesen and Walter's *Bibliography: Practical, Enumerative, Historical* (New York, Scribner's, 1928). Since that valuable treatise appeared, nearly thirty years ago, bibliographical activities in all fields have expanded enormously.

The present compendium is designed to review comprehensively the current status and future outlook of bibliography, general and special, at home and abroad, in every major area. The ambitious goal has not been achieved in full, in part because of the size of the undertaking and in part because qualified and willing authors could not be found for every field. Among the three dozen or so contributors to the two issues of *Library Trends* devoted to "Bibliography: Current State and Future Trends," however, few significant aspects of the science are omitted.

Perfect bibliographical control would imply a complete record of the existence and location of every book, every document, every article, even every written thought. The probabilities of ever reaching such a utopia are remote.

The problem of bibliographical control is as ancient as the beginning of writings. Catalogs of cuneiform tablets, for example, were found among the ancient Babylonians and lists of papyri among the Egyptians. The number of bibliographical compilations increased during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance era, but the troubles of bibliographers did not appear irremediable until the invention of typog-

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raphy in the fifteenth century and such subsequent developments as high-speed printing presses and wood-pulp paper.

As late as the eighteenth century, the delusion of the encyclopedic man persisted; until then it was generally taken for granted that a single human brain could comprehend and hold the entire existing knowledge. As knowledge proliferated and became broken down into more and more minute compartments and specialities, the burden of storing all man's learning and experience was gradually shifted to recorded forms—books, journals, manuscripts, film, sound recordings, and a multitude of other forms. Only in that way, it was realized, could any degree of control be maintained over the rapidly-widening horizon of science and learning.

In every era since printing began, men have dreamed of universal bibliographies which would record all books in existence. Examples include Conrad Gesner's *Bibliotheca Universalis* in 1545, and later compilations by Gottlieb Georgi, Jacques Brunet, and Johann Graesse; essentially, none went beyond western Europe. Among more specialized efforts have been the Concilium Bibliographicum, established in Zurich in 1890, to cover the world's literature of the biological sciences and kindred areas; and the *International Catalogue of Scientific Literature* (London, Royal Society, 1902-19), started at the beginning of the twentieth century, with the object of covering all fields of science. Neither of these undertakings was more than partially successful in reaching its goal.

Statistics of world book production are incomplete and inadequate. Book publishing goes on at a steadily accelerating rate and more books have come from the printing presses since 1900 than in the preceding 450 years. According to UNESCO annual reports, world book production is currently in excess of 400,000 titles per year. Two-thirds of the world's books are produced by twelve countries. In the periodical field, the third edition of the *Union List of Serials in the United States and Canada* records about 157,000 titles.

In the perspective of history, there is no reasonable doubt that effective national bibliographic organization must precede international or universal coverage. If universal bibliography is ever to be achieved, it must be grounded upon the work of individual countries. Neither the United States nor any other nation presently has full coverage, though all current American bibliographical publications combined come close to reaching that goal.

A thoroughgoing plan for bibliographical control must include pro-

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vision for subject bibliography. The most difficult problems in subject indexing and abstracting are encountered in the serial field, rather than with books. A majority of scientific fields are reasonably well provided with indexing services, but the humanities and social sciences are notably deficient. Subject bibliography, in brief, has always been and continues to be the weakest link in the chain of bibliographical control. This is the chief explanation of the widely prevailing concern with the application of automation, data processing equipment, and other mechanistic devices to the problems of bibliographical storage and retrieval, especially in the vast field of serial literature.

No one has summed up the aim of bibliographical control more admirably than did Professor H. A. Lorentz, at a session of the League of Nations Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, some forty years ago, when he remarked:

The end to be attained is that no book or manuscript should be out of reach—that we should be able to know where any book is to be found, and how it may be made accessible as easily as possible. You may think that is a little thing, but in reality it is a great thing.